

**DARK CRYSTAL: The Complete Special Effects Story**  
**DAVID CRONENBERG On VIDEODROME**

K49286

# FANTASTIC FILMS

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## RETURN OF THE JEDI



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Painting by BARBARA FISTER-LILTZ

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## •INSIDE•THE•D

FROM THE INSIDE OUT, FANTASY PHYSICAL AND CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT COMPLEX VISIONS OF ARTISTIC INNOVATION

Article by MICHAEL J. SIEGEL

**W**ith the holiday release of Jim Henson's fantasy adventure *The Dark Crystal*, state-of-the-art special effects have once again challenged the limitations of physical illusion. Combining sophisticated puppetry with film in a way never before attempted, *Dark Crystal* surrounds its audience with the sights and sounds of a timeless fairytale world far removed from any common reality.

*Dark Crystal* is the story of Jen, a shy elf-like creature who embarks on an odyssey of adventure and discov-

ery across an unknown world, through beautiful yet frightening landscapes where no human intrudes and each plant, tree and bush has an intelligence.

The unique and sometimes bizarre inhabitants of this magical realm have been brought to life by many gifted performers employing a variety of physical and mechanical techniques, including radio-control, electronics and hydraulics as well as the amazing puppetry of mentor Jim Henson, his associate Frank Oz and their troupe of Muppeteers.

Dark Crystal has taken more than four years to prepare and during that time new techniques have been developed in "puppet" fabrication. Tremendous advances have been made by *The Dark Crystal* production crews in the use of foam latex and the mechanisms that bring the characters to life. All the characters have complex facial movements, some as many as sixteen, but the development of hands capable of picking up an object with a comparatively simple triggering device is revolutionary to the art of puppetry.



# THE DARK CRYSTAL

STIC FILMS DOCUMENTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF ONE OF THE MOST MAGINATION EVER PUT ON FILM.

MAEL STEIN

## THE DESIGNS OF BRIAN Froud

The visual concept for *The Dark Crystal* and the world it portrays is ultimately the creation of renowned British fantasy artist Brian Froud, and although the idea for the film was Jim Henson's, the creatures evolved through mutual discussion.

"On my first visit to New York, I met with a small group of people who had done some work already on the project," explained Froud. "They had started to develop creatures

which, after I arrived, got more specific. Jim Henson's idea was for a world that had a life of its own where plants could communicate and mountains talked to each other. Everything was alive. The world was full of creatures, humans were never involved.

"It was six months before I could really get started and then I moved to New York for a while and worked there. In those early days, we would sit around and talk about the story and develop the characters, the way they lived and where. Everything

was developed in a sort of committee, which was great fun. Gradually, it got more and more refined and then David Odell wrote the story into a screenplay.

"I just sat down and drew lots of creatures," continued Froud, "and some were selected to be built, and some were not. The Skeksis were always reptilian. I cannot remember how the Mystics were originally described but most of the characters have developed to a certain extent. The Landstrider used to be a land spider and the Garthim originally had

appear (bathed in light) at the finale of the film; Pod-slaves in chains trudge through the castle corridors; Skeksis, the Ornamentalist, is a bizarre combination of the gaudy and the repulsive. The costumes for these creatures were mounted on "steady cam" harnesses around the actors' hips, for more mobility.

All photos this page Copyright 1982 Universal Studios



The Valley of the Mystics is under construction on one of the immense sound stages at Elstree Studios. Stratified caves and balanced stones were carved from styrofoam.

long, whippy tails.

"The biggest problem we faced and which has taken the longest to overcome," explained Froud, "was the development of the two main characters, Jen and Kira because they were intended to be more human than the other creatures. The Mystics, the old wrinkly ones, were relatively easy, but because Jen and Kira were smooth-faced we had problems with skin texture. Everyone knows how a human moves and what we look like, so we automatically set certain 'reality' expectations. And if they are not fulfilled, we are disappointed. It took a lot of time to sculpt and resculpt those heads; they changed a lot. At first they were quite simplistic, but in the end they contained a lot of emotional depth."

Together with the creatures, Froud had to create the world in which they lived. It was a world full of detail with a baroque *art deco* richness mixed with the fanciful, romantic, whimsical landscapes and architecture of a Victorian child's book of fairy tales.

Froud's drawings of this unique environment were then taken by Harry Lange, the Production Designer, and turned into a workable, tangible reality. "I didn't do big detailed paintings," explained Froud, "because I was always too busy dealing with things on the shop floor, such as overseeing the construction of the creatures them-

selves. That was really time consuming, so for the sets I only did pencil drawings. Harry's people turned them into models and we modified them from there. The result has been a tremendous three-dimensional translation of my work."

#### SHAPING THE DARK CRYSTAL

The unique originality of *Dark Crystal* also brought with it its own unique problems. A film of such fantastic designs and complex fabrications had never been attempted, and much of what was

needed had to be built from scratch. In the prototype work, everyone assumed that the technology needed to create the characters, creatures, and settings already existed. But when the time came for solutions, the answers were not there. As a result, the



The individual "creature" team leaders pose in this group shot. Artist Brian Froud and wife Wendy stand at far left.



Clockwise: top left, the *Dark Crystal* castle is photographed against a barren landscape. The plaster model of the castle under construction. One section of the Elstree workshop.

*Dark Crystal* team had to provide the answers, and in the process, a whole new technology was evolved.

Sherry Amott, Creative Supervisor of the Animatronic Department in London, was responsible for co-ordinating the construction of the characters and establishing groundwork for the project, a mammoth undertaking. Beginning with only seven people in a workshop in Hampstead (previously a post office,) the animatronic fabrication group quickly grew to sixty. Then, after hiring construction workers, plasterers, and the many other craft technicians involved, the total work force numbered in the hundreds.

"My job was to gather ideas from Jim Henson, Frank Oz, and Brian Froud, discuss them with Brian, then find someone to construct them," Sherry explained. "I had to depend on input from puppetmakers to understand the whole process before I could pinpoint what we were looking for. I looked in places where you wouldn't expect puppetmakers to be. I looked at jewelry makers and watch repairers to be mechanical designers; dollmakers, and pottery and ceramic majors in art school became our best mold makers. I looked for people with a whimsical inventiveness combined with various skills and interests which would strengthen the group and make it more flexible."



Top, a mime/actor poses in the position required to animate one of the slow-moving Mystics. Below, full-size mockups of Jen and his Mystic master are positioned for scale comparison.

But as work on *Dark Crystal* got into full swing, specialized and sometimes wholly obscure materials were needed to complete the individual projects. *Yellow Pages* became an indispensable standby.

"The first thing I did when I came to London," confessed Sherry, "was order telephone books. That's how I found sources for materials such as the Malaysian Rubber Producers' Research Association, which became our major source for the large quantities of rubber needed to mold the heads, hands, and feet of the creatures.

"Wendy Midener-Froud (wife of fantasy artist Brian Froud) was working with the figures, Jen and Kira, and trying out various ways to cover them to create a movable skin," Sherry continued. "It was Jim (Henson) who suggested using latex foam. Dick Smith, who did the special makeup on *Altered States* and *Little Big Man*, came in as a consultant. He worked with us and showed us how to use the material. It is a very involved, very meticulous process in which everything has to be scientifically notated in order to be reproduced. Tom McLaughlin, the foam lab supervisor, carefully recorded these calculations and measurements. Throughout the film something like nine tons of rubber were imported from both Malaysia and America.

"Mastering that technology took a long time," Sherry admitted. "But the puppets depended on it. You

could not replicate them in any other way. The creatures had to be lifelike, flexible, moveable, and lightweight. They had to be easy to get in and out of, in case of fire, and also be able to accommodate a small video screen underneath that the performer could watch.

"Before *Dark Crystal* there had been a variety of big creatures built on backpacks," Sherry informed us. "But our Skeksis costume was heavy, and it was difficult to lift your arm to work the puppet. So we decided to build the costume on a harness, which would allow the weight to be carried on the hips. This way we could free the performers arms."

"So on Jim's suggestion, I tracked down a 'steadicam harness,' which was developed to support the Skeksis. A prototype was taken into the production stage, and the mechanical designers turned out about twenty. This was an original idea of Jim's that turned into something we couldn't do without. It will become the basis for future puppets, I am sure."

One of the most difficult items on Sherry Amott's shopping list for the film was eyes. "Rubber was our biggest problem," Sherry continued, "but it took us longest to find realistic artificial eyes for the characters. They just didn't exist. The eyes for stuffed animals that taxidermists use are half-round and come in standard types: lizard, dog, and so on. Then there are artificial eyes for humans, which are generally cup-shaped to conform to the eye muscle. What we needed had to eventually be custom-designed and manufactured. The size of the pupil was particularly important, as far as focusing the eye-line of the puppet. The relationship between the eyes and the camera is what makes the characters come alive."

### THE GELFLINGS

Jen and Kira are Gelflings, elf-like creatures who are the hero and heroine of *The Dark Crystal*. Because they are the most human-like of the creatures in the film they were the most difficult to perfect. Wendy Midener-Froud, the Conceptual Designer, sculpted the Gelflings.

"They were the only two characters who were not really pre-designed," Wendy revealed. "I just kept sculpting until everyone said, 'Yes, that's what we want'. They were a combination of ideas that Jim and Brian had and I just put them together. Brian had always fought for less realistic looking characters. He wanted them to be somewhere between the Gelflings and peasants and Jim wanted them to be more heroic."

"They are meant to be a combination of human and animal which is why we went through so many sculptures. We found that the closer we got the character to an animal, the uglier they were. It was fine for Jen but to get Kira to look pretty enough was a problem. I think they've ended up, Jen especially, looking part monkey, part deer. Kira is just a tamer version."



Photos: Left to right, top row down; Wendy Midener-Froud works on some early latex face appliances for Kira and the Pod-People. An assortment of Pod-People masks pose for the camera. Lyle Conway, team leader for Aughra sculpts the initial form of the creature's face out of clay. The final latex mask, complete with eye and hair. Below, the finished Kira sits on a stone throne.

One of the major problems in the fabrication of the Gelflings was getting the right skin texture. Because they were the characters which looked the most like humans, certain expectations were inevitable. "They are the only smooth skinned

characters in the film," Wendy explained. "Any kind of surface bubble in the latex skin would show up. There were hundreds of 'skins' we could not use because of a tiny air bubble in it somewhere."

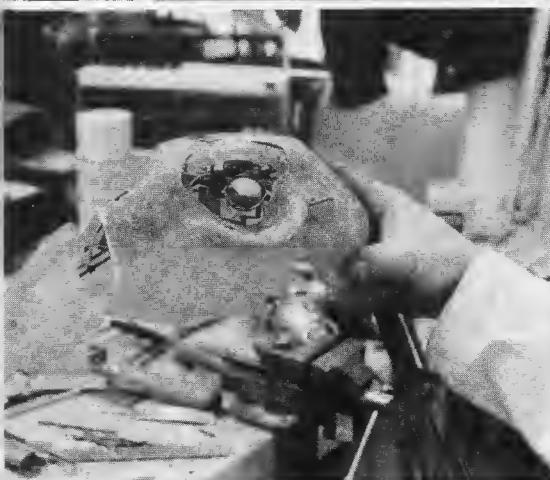
The Gelfling's skin wasulti-

mately made from latex foam but that was not the original plan. "The first 'head' I had was a hard latex under-structure with a chamois leather skin over it," Wendy described. "It looked interesting and was a nice texture but it didn't move enough. In the beginning we didn't know whether the creatures were going to be able to do anything, but I think it was Jim (Henson) who heard of using latex foam and Dick Smith came in and worked with us for several weeks. Dick is one of the top make-up specialists in this field. Stuart Freeborn, who created creatures for *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, also gave help and advice in this area."

"Along with Tom McLaughlin, I was one of the first to work with the latex," Wendy continued. "Then I went off to work on Yoda for *The Empire Strikes Back* and that was the first time anyone had used a total latex skin for a puppet. Yoda actually was our experimental test run for the creatures in *Dark Crystal*. Needless to say he was a success."

Because they were creatures from a fantasy world, the Gelflings had characteristics that were uniquely extraordinary. Jen's body was ridged and marked and he had a "blue" forehead and tip to his nose and ears. "We had a scene of Jen naked by a pool," Wendy smiled. "The whole point was to show that Jen isn't quite human."





Photos: Left to right, top row down. Tod Krzanski creates some of the mechanical effects that operate the outer latex "skin" of one of the Skeksis. Finishing touches are added to one of the mystic costumes. A Skeksis fibreglass skull reveals some of the intricate mechanisms that move the eyes and beak. Jen gets a final makeup job. Below, one of the Skeksis, fully clothed.

That scene got expanded into a much more complex piece than it was originally intended. We found he could do more things, without his clothes on, than we thought. It was just going to be long shots of him sitting there but now he also moves and plays the flute.

"The mouth had to work basically in the same way as a human's," Wendy added. "But the heads were so tiny that it was hard to get a hand in to work everything the right way. There was also a width distortion. Because they had no wrinkles in their faces there was no place for the foam to move. They had very smooth faces with not much stretch in them. If the mouths were sculpted too wide they creased in folds at the side when they closed; human skin if it is stretched goes back into shape, but latex doesn't. That was a problem."

Jen and Kira were sculpted to fit the hands of their performers, Jim Henson and Kathy Mullen. Wendy took casts of their hands and then made back-plates to fit which took up half the space in the skull; the other half was taken up by other mechanisms.

The skin tone was achieved by coloring the foam to gain a basic color then adding makeup on top. "I use an oil based makeup," Wendy explained. "It was made especially for foam because everything else 'skins over' and tends to wrinkle too much. The only prob-

lem was, it loses that sheen human skin has. It stays on until the light hits it and then . . ."

Bringing the Gelflings to life presented problems different from those faced by the other performers. Kathy Mullen, the person

behind Kira, discovered she had to acquire a new repertoire of moves as little of what she had learned doing Muppet shows was relevant to giving life to a Gelfling.

"The Gelflings were much more subtle," she revealed, "Doing Mup-



pets, you would build up a repertoire of moves. There are many basic actions we already knew, but this didn't necessarily hold true for these characters. If you tried to do the same things they would just look like puppets; we had to come up with something that was closer to human movement. For the other characters, such as the Skeksis and the Peasants, you could almost use the Muppet moves. But it was very very difficult to make the Gelflings look real."

Kathy had worked for two months prior to the start of filming rehearsing "body movements" with a model and a video set-up. Even though much of the movement in the Gelflings' faces was operated by radio control. This had the advantage of dispensing with a cable-control crew but meant emotion was being interpreted by a separate operator sitting at some distance from Kathy.

"I couldn't depend on Kira, when she was in close-up, to have just her face convey the emotion. I had to let Kira make some sort of move as well, and when I found the right move it worked. But the only way I could do this was to experiment and I didn't always know what was coming up. Six takes later I would suddenly realize, 'That's how I do it!' But half the time it was already too late, and we had to move on to another shot.

"The remote control head for me has been the difference between night and day," admitted Kathy. "It was the difference between a mechanical head with big fat cables running out the back with three people hanging on to them, and a totally free-moving head with no cables restricting me. I don't have any emotional and physical restrictions, and I didn't have to worry about people falling and running after me."

### THE SKEKSIS

The Evil Masters of *The Dark Crystal*, were sculpted by Lyle Conway. They are perhaps the most complex in the film and their heads are a mass of detailed modeling relating to the character of each creature.

"They have changed completely since the beginning," Conway explained. "Small models had been made in New York from Brian Froud's drawings but when we came to London it was decided they would all be a little different from each other. They were given definite characters and their jobs dictated what their face and costume would look like. They have much more personality now," Conway added. "They were much more vicious-looking in the beginning, more animal-like."

The Skeksis heads had more working parts in them than the other creatures, and the Chamberlain was most complicated of all with 21 separate cables operating various movements.

"His eyebrows, beak, eyelids, eyes all have movement either up or down or side to side," Conway detailed. "There are pneumatic con-

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# DARK CRYSTAL

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trolls for underneath his chin, he sneers and all the movements have different angles.

"They all also had independent eye movement but varied in other ways. The Historian had only two working parts, eye-blink and left-to-right eyes, but the High Priest has an eye bulge, left-to-right and eye-blink, the General was more involved. He had an eyebrow with two different pivot points, pneumatic controls under the eyelid and two sneers."

The body of the Skeksis was the work of Sarah Bradpiece. She both sculpted it and created the costumes. "My first priority was to establish exactly what a Skeksis 'body' looked like," Sarah explained. "There is a scene where the Chamberlain is stripped of his clothes, so we had to create a naked Skeksis.

"It was so nebulous that I created stratas in the body which, because the body material was latex, I knew we could cut through for flexibility when we came to mechanize it. Basically the Skeksis were supposed to be as hideous as possible, which is why they wore all those layers of clothes."

## THE MYSTICS

Originally called the UrRu, these creatures are the gentle philosophers who live in the Hidden Valley, waiting for the Grand Conjunction. Their heads and hands were sculpted by Tim Clark who also built the complex cable mechanisms that operate them. Tim began work on The Dark Crystal in 1979, when he joined the Henson Organization in New York, and like all the creatures, the Mystics were created from Brian Froud's sketches.

"The first one I did was Jen's dying Master," Tim told us, "which I modeled after prototype heads which had been sculpted from clay. Then Brian gave me drawings for the first four heads. They were in color and very detailed but after that I just took pencil sketches.

"The faces of the Mystics were marked with whirls and spirals, each head different. Detailed sketches showed exactly where and how Brian Froud wanted the spirals to appear. But as I got into feeling how he wanted things, Brian just left it to me where they were added," Tim explained.

The heads of the Mystics were made totally of latex foam and had several moving parts. The eyelids blinked, the eyebrows moved, the eyes moved from left to right, and some had "breathing mechanisms." The shape of the creature was such that the head was "worn" by the performer at the end of his outstretched right hand, which operated the blink mechanism and some of the lip movement. All other movement was operated by cable crews out of camera range.

The profile of the Mystics was totally different from the human



Photos: Top, the foam latex mock-up of a Skeksis costume is measured for height. Bottom, the preliminary clay model for a Skeksis head before final sculpt.

body. The creature had four arms and walked low to the ground. The performer had to squat on his haunches, his head bent forward with right arm extended. It was an uncomfortable position to hold and even more demanding when the creature was required to walk; muscles strained as limbs were forced into unnatural effort. As the performer manipulated the head, he could operate only one of four arms. The other three were manipulated when needed by two other performers.

Brian Muehl, a mime who performed the Mystic, Urzah and the Dying Master, had been involved in the characters' development for over three years. "The Mystics were the most difficult of the body puppets," revealed Muehl. "We had a monitor on close-ups, but most shots in the Mystic Valley scenes were wide and had no monitor. Because the creature has a sort of human face, all the camera angles were important. Given the visual complexity of that character, it was tough."

## THE GARTHIM

Brutal warriors who carry out the orders of the Skeksis, the Garthim were huge beetle-like creatures with lobster-claws and were the creation of Fred Nihda. "I don't think they were inspired by any given creature," Nihda told us. "Originally they were closest to a lobster, then evolved into any shell-like creature but we didn't want the audience to say, 'I know him.' So we deliberately avoided getting too close to any specific creature.

"Brian did a basic drawing but a certain amount of liberty was allowed for sculptural reasons. As we changed the motivation and saw the entity in three dimensions, we then had to alter certain proportions to make it look more evil, more viable, less human-like. We saw a lot of natural science films, nature films and studied books and photographs, but the basic inspiration was Brian's."

The Garthim was sculpted in pieces of styrofoam, then refined in texture by using plasticine. Then a negative mold was made of fiberglass from which the positive pieces were cast, also in fiberglass. Each piece of the creature was sculpted and pulled in a positive form before the next piece to get a proper overlapping and interlocking system. All the pieces were as lightweight as possible and although the fiberglass was kept to a minimum weight, the whole costume weighed some 70 lbs. Much of the weight was in the legs and the belly because the back shell was mounted on a harness and most of its weight floated off the harness and hardly touched the performer.

"The Garthim was a total of 590 pieces," Nihda stated, "and each piece was individually cast. The eyes lit up and moved from side-to-side by remote control. Its arms had shoulder and elbow joints and one hand a claw that opened and closed; the other, two fingers and a thumb. At the base of his stomach he had small mechanized claws which were operated by a second performer on rare occasions. These make a clacking noise and could hold a peasant captive while the Garthim reached for something else." Muehl chose the Garthim as one of his characters because they were a challenge. "We were very much in a quandary as to how they should move at first," he says. "There is a time when they have to move fast because that is how they look good on film; but they are like tanks, they are very heavy. It slows you down, but you also have to create the illusion they are four times heavier than they are. For me that is the contradiction. I'd love to be able to find the speed necessary and at the same time give the creature enough weight so the viewer could believe it weighed as much as a 3-ton truck. If we started moving too fast he looked like fiberglass. What makes it scary is when we can make the audience 'see' that

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# DARK CRYSTAL

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weight. That's true mime, creating illusion."

## THE LANDSTRIDERS

The Landstriders, long-legged creatures with small friendly faces and walrus moustaches, were sculpted and developed by Valerie Charlton, and were possibly the most difficult of all the creatures to build. Working from a small sketch drawn by Brian Froud she built a quarter scale model around a wooden figure of a man. "From that I began sculpting the back legs, body, skeleton and head," she explained. "Everything was worked out first as anatomical drawings, so that the body, strange as it was, could be believable. We viewed films of giraffes, went to the zoo, studied pictures of long legged animals and collected a library of books of strange animals with strange textures of skin."

In order to create the height necessary for the Landstrider, the performer was required to wear stilts. They were strapped to his legs and forearms, then he had to assume a position as if on all fours. "Our first priority was to develop a stilt that was comfortable and would put the artist in the right position to accommodate movement on all four legs," Valerie continued. "Eventually, we designed a stilt that was tipped slightly forward so the performer would be 'thrown' onto the Landstrider's front legs as it galloped."

The stilts were 48" tall and made from carbon fiber, which was thinner than fiberglass but had more tensile strength. "We experimented with everything before we found carbon fiber," Valerie revealed. "The shape of the creature was created by thin shells fitted onto the performer, and the skeleton and stilts were constructed individually to give a perfect fit. The outside shape was cast in plaster-zote which is very, very light and flexible. The head had a fiber-glass skull with foam latex skin on top. The creature also had a moving skeleton, a flexible spine, moving rib cage and pelvis; tendons moved from the pelvis down to the legs. We didn't want a 'static' body shape, but instead something that was anatomically viable. Consequently, much of our time was involved in getting the movement right and making the costume light and strong enough to allow the performer to run, jump and fight. That's especially tricky when he's 4 1/2 ft. off the ground."

Other aspects of the Landstrider's construction were equally as painstaking, if not even more unique in their solutions. For example, the strangely textured "skin" of the Landstrider came from the stomach linings of a cow. "I went to a slaughterhouse," Valerie disclosed, "got the innards of a cow, laid them all out and made casts. It was rather messy but necessary; you can't model skin texture like that."

The head of the creature also underwent various changes over the months of construction. The original design called for the creature to have a long neck, but this design proved too difficult to control. "I felt it was necessary to have the head as close to the performer's as possible," Valerie explained. "He was in such a difficult position and had so many other things to think about, he didn't need another obstruction. Now the head fits on the front of the performer's head and he controls it by the movement of his own head. Like all the creatures in the film the Landstrider's head has several moving parts. By radio control his eyes blink and pivot, the eyebrows and snout move and there is a special piece of bone that comes from above the lip for the fight with the Garthim."

## AUGHRA

Lyle Conway sculpted Aughra, the sorceress who helped Jen learn the nature of his quest. "Originally, 'she' was a 'he', called Habdabab," Conway revealed, "and was much more animal-like with crab-like pincers, a high forehead and whiskers. I think she became a woman to add more feminine inter-

mittence. "When they first saw him they said, 'let's make him a little more ferocious, let's give him double rows of teeth'."

Although based on a design by Brian Froud, Fizpig underwent a few structural alterations during the months when the film was in preparation. "Originally, he was a much smaller animal," Rollie explained. "Now he's kind of bulky and big. He had a smaller head and a tiny mouth and was much more cat-like; now he is more like a dog. But the challenge was to get him to work. At first he was only a round ball of fur, but I told Jim he was not going to work without feet and asked if I could put some on. If he didn't like them I promised I would take them off. The first time Jim realized Fizpig had back feet was during the rushes where Fizpig was hanging onto the Crystal."

Fizpig's fur is stuck to a base knitted by Rollie from elastic thread. His nose is foam, his teeth dental acrylic and his face lion's tail. "I stuck each hair on individually with tweezers," Rollie explained of the puppet's face. "The raccoon fur came from an old coat, and the lamb was the collar from another coat. The lion's tail I found

## "The strangely textured 'skin' of the Landstrider came from the stomach linings of a cow."

est to the film. She also grew horns."

Aughra has one eye which she removes from its socket at will and holds in the air to see what is happening around her, but her face also has several moving parts. "Frank Oz, who brings her to life, handled Aughra's lip and upper mouth movement with his right hand," Conway added. "Frank's right hand was in hers and someone else operated the left hand. Cable crews operated her eyebrows, eye blinks and bulges."

## FIZGIG

Fizpig is a ball of fur with two rows of teeth resembling a trap, but his ferocity is very much on the surface. He is devoted to Kira and in reality is something of a clown. Fizpig was fabricated by Rollie Krewson from five different kinds of fur: opossum, racoon, fox, lamb and lion's tail. "They are all mixed together and put on an elastic cloth," Rollie detailed. "His head was the usual foam latex and is made to fit puppeteer Dave Goelz's hand."

Because Fizpig was so small, there were eight versions of him, each able to do something different. On one Fizpig the eyes blink, another has eyes moving from right to left, two had a large mouth and angry teeth and another two were furry balls. "His teeth are a quirk of Jim and Frank," Rollie ad-

mitted. "When they first saw him they said, 'let's make him a little more ferocious, let's give him double rows of teeth'."

In one scene Fizpig accidentally fell into a pool of water, "but I gave him a bubble bath, dried him with a hair dryer and he was alright again," Rollie smiled.

## THE POD PEOPLE

Simple peasants who lived in the depths of the forest, the Pod People tended all things that grew, particularly the great Pod plants, in whose vast seed-pods they made their village. There they filled their lives with laughter, food, and song. And it was the Pod People who rescued the orphaned Kira after the ruin of the Gelfling village by the Garthim, who raised her and taught her to appreciate life as they experienced it. And it was the Pod People who, in their innocence, fell prey to the Skeksis, for the Skeksis discovered that by extracting and imbibing the life-force of those simple folk, their own bodily energies could be renewed even if only temporarily.

The Pod villagers and slaves were standard hand-and-rod puppets, usually requiring only one

person to manipulate them, though several persons were needed to operate the Pod musicians. Sherry Amott oversaw the construction, fabrication, and realization of these characters. Working closely with her were Tom McLaughlin, who molded the Pod skins; Polly Smith, who designed and crafted the costumes for the Pod villagers; Ellis Duncan, who, working from Brian Froud's sketches, fabricated the slave costumes; Bob Payne, who assembled the puppets.

The garments themselves, which all had an ethnic cast, were hand-crafted of raw silk. The fabric was hand-dyed to achieve muddied warm earthtones and red highlights. The costumes were all hand-stitched, then distressed, creating an old, worn look.

## THE ENVIRONMENTAL CREATURES

Swamp, forest and valley of *The Dark Crystal* were inhabited by a myriad of strange and amusing creatures. These 'environmental creatures,' some 150 of them, were the responsibility of Tim Miller. Most were built by The Muppet Workshop in New York and were a mixture of marionette and hand puppet. "We were trying to achieve 'fantasy/realism' so we worked with real fur and feathers," Miller explained. "We were limited with skins because so many animals are now endangered. We used a lot of nutria, opossum and hundreds of pheasant feathers. The feathers were bought from a feather merchant in London by the pound. The merchant specialized in small pheasant feathers and his business was undergoing a boom brought about by the popularity of *Dallas*. Everyone wanted a Stetson with feathers in the hatband, just like J.R."

## THE URSEKES

The Urskeks were the beings who inhabited the Castle of *The Dark Crystal* in the time before the film begins. An experiment went wrong while they were trying to rid themselves of their negative aspects and they became two creatures, the Mystics (originally called the UrRu and the Skeksis).

The Urskeks are also the work of Lyle Conway. Ten feet tall, the Urskeks are imposing figures with long streaming hair. "We built full-size Urskeks that don't do very much," he revealed. "Their eyes blink; but there will be a smaller version which will be a little more complicated with some mouth movement and a pulsating forehead. They really have been created by optical effects," Conway explained. "Rays and beams and sparkling effects which were laid in during post production."

As of this printing, *The Dark Crystal* has proven itself financially as well as artistically. Five years of painstaking research and physical labor have created one of the most complete fantasy worlds ever committed to film, and hopefully only the first of many new Jim Henson projects. ■



# DISCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE DARK CRYSTAL



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